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HOW TO ARRANGE WILD-FLOWERS.



DO not, as a rule, tie wild-flowers in bouquets. There are a thousand effective ways of massing them without a suspicion of stiffness. Arrange them alone, always, that is, don't

mix any garden or hot-house flowers with them. The American flora has a delicate characteristic beauty of its own, altogether at variance with the coarseness and gorgeousness of many cultivated flowers.

Our earliest spring flower is the trailing arbutus, which blooms, in the neighborhood of Philadelphia, between the middle of March and the latter end of April. If you do not wish to wait until March, before trying your hand at decorating your table from the woodland treasures, go out to the woods any fine winter's day, and gather mosses, lichens, and lycopodiums. Of the first, some are velvety, some silky, of all shades of green, from emerald to olive. The second are in exquisite tints of

sages, pearls, and grays, some bearing tiny, leathery, red blossoms. We have three common varieties of the third, popularly known as club-moss, or crow-foot, ground-pine, and running-pine. The evergreen, or Christmas fern, is also abundant—less so the broader shield-fern, resembling the lady-fern in its fringed frond. The partridge-berry, with its glossy, green vine, and bright, scarlet fruit, is plentiful everywhere. Having brought your spoils home, take a soup-plate and half fill it with water. Pack it full of the velvety mosses, arrange around it a border of evergreen ferns, to droop over and hide the edge of the plate. Above this form a "ruche" of lycopodium, thus making a "crow's-nest." In the center of this, dispose your tints of green, in mosses and lichens, and add the finishing touches with the brilliant globes of the partridge-berry. A more beautiful, artistic center ornament cannot be imagined.

Bright-colored blossoms do not look so well in gayly painted vases. But a gorgeous Japanese receptacle is just the thing to hold a loose, spreading bunch of crowfoot, or evergreen fern; the latter, however, looks equally well in a

common jar or earthen pot. For a mantel, bracket, or side-table, ferns are quite as effective as small palm-trees. Fill a flower-pot with sand, and stick into it as many fern fronds as it will hold, just as if they had grown so. This ornament will keep for several days.

When the arbutus comes, it may be massed with the moss of a crow's-nest. But it must never be arranged with any colored flower. It is so exquisite in itself, that no other bloom can bear comparison with it; a glossy green background, like its own leaves, is the only thing that it can stand. The rare pixie of the New Jersey pine barrens should be treated in the same way; that is, with moss, ferns, or alone, loosely disposed in a saucer or a slender, colorless glass vase. Even a small bunch of arbutus is considered as choice as pearls—this, on a table where it may be seen, is to the decoration of a room as the solitaire diamond to a lady's whole attire. The few who can command a plateful may well lay themselves open to the charge of vulgar excess.

Violets look well alone, without an atom of green visible—so do grape hyacinths and blue hepaticas. Fill a delicate white china bowl with a crowded mass of any of these, and the result will be good. There are no blue violets, remember; they are purple, white, and yellow. We have ten species in these latitudes—the bird-foot, the arrow-leaved, the common purple, the dog, the heart-leaved, and the hand-leaved, all purple; the striped and the sweet-scented white, streaked with black; and the woolly and the round-leaved, both yellow. The bird-foot is the handsomest, of a pale mauve tint, with golden center. Now, you suspect how to arrange “a symphony in violets.”

Little bunches of violets, hyacinths (“blue-bottles”), and hepaticas, in rosebud vases, are very dainty.

Fairy anemones may be massed like puffs of snow in painted vases or jardinières; so may the handsome blood-roots, resembling crocuses or tulips, with their pearly petals and golden stamens. Later, when the flowers have come in abundance, make great pillows of color, by filling meat-dishes and trays. As summer approaches, the lady-fern and maidenhair may be used for dainty borders. Flowering shrubs, as laurel, azalea, and shadbush, should stand upright, in tall vases, with their own branches and leaves. Never put an orchid with other flowers; it is too precious to lose its identity. Stand it alone—in a bottle if you have nothing else suitable.

Through summer and autumn, the wild-flowers become more and more abundant, at length fairly running riot in luxuriance and color. Spring flowers generally have low, weak stems, so should be arranged low; but autumn flowers are tall and stout, so high decorations are in order. Stand a vase or celery-glass in a soup-plate, and upon these arrange a floral column with broad base. The foundation can be completely covered. Buttercups, daisies, cone-flower, cardinal-flower, shell-flower, arrow-head, golden-rod, gerardia, and aster are all suitable for the upright part; so are sprays and autumn leaves, branches of berries and evergreens. Ferns, mosses, leaves, and trailing vines may cover the base. Let a vine trail naturally to the floor. Wild clematis, with either its white blossoms or feathery pericarps; wild pea and bean vines; Virginia creeper, with crimson leaves; or bitter-sweet, with

its red berries, are all suitable. The berries of the wild turnip, sassafras, spice bush, sumach, and dog-wood are as effective as those of the bitter-sweet.

No positive rules can here be given for the arrangement of high masses of wild-flowers, ferns, leaves and berries, except, avoid stiffness, aiming for the loose luxuriance of nature; avoid glaring contrasts of color, as blue and purple, red and pink; endeavor to have the pale tints near the top, for high lights, the dark at the bottom, for shadow.

Despise nothing that grows. Everything like a flower, leaf, or fruit can generally be used. Few would think of Jack-in-the-pulpit as effective in decoration, but it is, just as much so as its relative the calla.

Following is a description of one of the prettiest bouquets I ever saw. A Jack for the center of a pyramid, with white anemones ranged around it. Then a circle of purple violets and hyacinths, with two sprays of red maple, facing each other; a fringe of garlic and a sheathing border, composed of two skunk-cabbage leaves. The boy who made it did so "for fun," but, fun or no fun, he "hit it."

Tall grasses are always graceful—the variety is infinite. Late autumn and early spring give us the tassels of the alder, like nature's passementerie. The woolly leaves of the mullein make a pretty plush mat, upon which may be disposed a dainty floral creation. The

purplish plumes of the Joe-pie of the swamps may be made to resemble a puff of mist. The white umbels of the wildcarrot, if mingled with bright color, are as dainty as swan's-down. The withered bunches of the golden-rod are of the same tint and appearance as the natural-hued ostrich-feather, while those of the aster are like silvery pompons. Artists have told us that cattails are effective—so are calamus and rushes. White yarrow, like the chrysanthemum, blooms until Christmas, and is quite pretty with pink clover, which also blooms throughout December, in company with the dandelions. It will thus be seen that decorations from the native flora may be secured any day in the year. The life-everlasting, for a winter bouquet, has lately attracted the fashionable eye.

Evergreen decoration, or Christmas green, is a subject of itself; but it may be well to say: Arrange the green in large masses, in full wreaths, and gracefully falling festoons. Don't torture evergreen into impossible shapes, or weaken the effect by cutting it up too much, but make it look as though you had actually brought a piece of the woods into the house. To illustrate: Some take a dozen ferns, and pin one here and there all over the wall, each one separately thus becoming a spot, and a spot only; others would arrange all in a rich cluster, and let it fill a vacant corner, where it would mean something. There are similar wrong and right ways of arranging evergreens.

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